NASA News

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Goddard Space Flight Center
Wallops Flight Facility
Wallops Island, VA 23337-5099

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Betty Flowers
elizabeth.b.flowers.1@gsfc.nasa.gov
Telephone: 757-824-1584

Dolores Beasley
Headquarters, Washington, DC
(Phone: 202-358-1753)

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NASA BALLOON FLIGHT ABORTED

After developing a leak, the test flight of a new NASA scientific balloon was terminated 4 hours 17 minutes following launch Sunday morning from Alice Springs, Australia.

The Ultra-Long Duration Balloon (ULDB) was launched at 9:21 a.m., Feb. 25. (Alice Springs local time) (6:51 p.m. EST, Feb. 24). The balloon reached an altitude of approximately 85,000 feet (25,907 meters) prior to beginning a descent.

The flight was terminated at an altitude of 79,000 feet (24,078 meters). The balloon and its scientific payload landed 132 miles (212 kilometers) west-southwest of the launch site. There were no injuries or damage to personal property. The payload landed upright and appears to be in excellent condition. Recovery operations are underway.

"A team is reviewing data from the flight and examining the recovered balloon. A recommendation is expected by the end of this week concerning the possible flight of a backup balloon that NASA has available in Alice Springs, " said Steve Smith, Chief of the Balloon Program Office at the NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, Va. "We are confident in the concept of the ULDB and in providing scientists with a new means of studying the Earth and space," he said.

The ULDB is the largest-single cell, super pressure (fully sealed) balloon ever flown. While the test flight was expected to last only about two weeks and circumnavigate the globe, the ULDB is designed to support missions for up to 100 days. Balloons provide cost-effective platforms for near-space observations.

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The ULDB floats above 99 percent of the Earth's atmosphere and was carrying a 4,500 pound (2041.2 kilogram) payload. The pumpkin-shaped balloon is composed of a lightweight polyethylene film about the thickness of ordinary plastic food wrap.

Further information on the ULDB program can be found at:
http://www.wff.nasa.gov/~uldb/index.html

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